



WHAT'S THE NEWS? 8

JANUARY 2004

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

HELLO FRIENDS

Welcome to the eighth issue of the Friends NFSA newsletter and the first for 2004.

This short issue provides some of the latest information about what is happening with the Archive and lets you know a range of ways in which you can help. Please make sure you express your opinion. As the inspirational Margaret Mead insists—you can make a difference!

CONTENTS

1. **THE MINNOW AND THE WHALE**
2. ***CINDERELLA BETRAYED* ARCHIVE FORUM RESPONDS TO THE AFC's *Directions* paper**
3. **HOW YOU CAN RESPOND TO THE CURRENT DEBATE**
4. **INVITATION TO THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION'S STAKEHOLDER FORUMS**

THE MINNOW AND THE WHALE

1. Last June 2003, the Australian Film Commission (AFC) was given custodianship of a national cultural institution on a par with the National Library, the National Gallery and the National Museum. Both the Minister for the Arts and Sport and the AFC undertook publicly that the integrity of the institution would be maintained. In good faith, many of us in the community accepted these assurances at face value, even though it seemed a little like a minnow being given responsibility for a whale.

2. However, the proposals outlined in the AFC's *Directions* paper tell a very different story. In the very first section, we find that instead of restoring the name of the Archive to one that is appropriate for a national institution, the AFC is proposing 'Australian Film and Sound Archive' on the grounds that it is more 'consistent' with the name of the governing body—the 'Australian Film' Commission. The Archive should not be made to sound like just another subordinate branch of the AFC. The proposed name is indicative of a fundamental lack of respect for the responsibility that the AFC has been given.

3. One of the concerns that is emerging about the AFC is that, increasingly, it is looking like an inappropriate body to be given responsibility for the Archive. It funds films, is involved in industry

development, and engages actively in wide areas of the industry, but these activities do not qualify it to make heritage decisions or to make decisions about an institution that manages heritage resources. Neither the AFC, nor any of its staff, has ever had anything to do with heritage issues.

4. One of the most crucial changes proposed by the AFC's *Directions* paper is the removal of much of the Archive's cultural outreach work, its public programmes. These are being transferred to another branch of the AFC, under the control of another staff member of the AFC, and not under the control of the Archive's Director. The effect of this transfer of functions is basically to strip the Archive of much of its life-blood. Without a full range of public programmes, any Archive becomes a mere repository, a technical facility. The public programmes give sense and purpose to the Archive, and keep preservation resources focused on outcomes. (As someone once said, nothing is really preserved until it has been made accessible to the public). A broad range of access programmes cannot be removed without profoundly damaging the institution's integrity. There is no doubt that the programmes need to be enhanced, but they need to be enhanced under the umbrella of the Archive, under the control of the Archive's own Director and his or her staff. Without these functions, no major figure will be attracted to the position of Director of the Archive. One is left with the concern that the AFC envisages the Director of the Archive as a technical functionary. We have to ask: will the Archive's new Director be the best person for the Archive or the most compliant.

5. The AFC has just issued a *Directions* paper Fact Sheet that does not mention the crucial fact that the expansion of the cultural outreach activities of the Archive (its public programmes) will be happening under someone else's direction, not under the control of the Archive's Director. Without this crucial information, the Fact Sheet is fundamentally misleading, and anyone who supports the AFC's proposals on the basis of this information will be endorsing the dismantling of core areas of the Archive's work.

6. The AFC has announced that they will not be making any staff redundant in their restructure of the Archive. They have, however, by announcing redundancies and then withdrawing them, created an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that is having the effect anyway that the AFC wanted to achieve. We are witnessing an exodus of key people from the Archive. An atmosphere of 'us' and 'them' has been created, which the AFC is going to have a hard time undoing. It is very hard to get calm, clear rational thinking about what is best for the Archive when the AFC's management of the place has been so melodramatic and angry.

7. It is a mystery why the AFC is not glorying in the prestige and status, both national and international, it could achieve by being custodian of this major institution. Instead, the focus seems to be to try to make the Archive invisible within the AFC's structure, strip it of major functions, remove its power and ensure that there is no possibility of it ever being more prominent than the AFC itself—or perhaps, more importantly, ensuring that no Archive staff have more power or influence than the AFC's own staff. The AFC needs to realise that it is a huge breach of trust if it persists with its plans to raid the Archive to enhance other areas of the AFC. The only possible motives are cynical and self-serving: apart from the possibility that it is all driven by a personal grab for power by the AFC's Chief Executive and senior staff, one can only assume that by spreading the Archive's functions and resources around the AFC, the AFC is then a good deal stronger in the face of constant reviews and political change. The Archive is being exploited to prop up the vulnerability of the AFC.

8. No one would question the view that the Archive needs some changes and its public programmes especially need enhancing and re-focussing, but there is no reason why these changes cannot be achieved by the existing staff and with the existing resources and the existing organizational structure: what is needed are leadership and the development of a new corporate culture. What the AFC proposes entails

weak leadership (core powers removed) and, on the evidence to date, a corporate culture based on threats, fear and intimidation.

9. We are witnessing a huge loss of public confidence in the Archive. I have had calls from filmmakers asking me if, in my opinion, they should withdraw their films from the Archive. Doubt and instability seem to be the order of the day at the Archive, with much worse to come if the AFC persists in its proposals.

10. The AFC—and the Minister for the Arts and Sport behind it—needs to defuse the current crisis by taking several urgent steps:

(a) Create an advisory committee for the Archive and consult with this committee before making any further changes to the Archive's organisation, staffing or functions. This committee should meet more frequently than twice a year (!) as proposed by the AFC and should be independently chaired;

(b) Appoint a Director based on criteria that are publicly discussed and approved by the advisory committee;

(c) delay any further actions proposed in the *Directions* paper until the advisory committee is functioning, the Archive's Director is appointed and acceptable forms of public involvement are established; and

(d) Make a public commitment, once again, that the AFC undertakes to respect absolutely the integrity of the Archive and all of its functions and resources.

Andrew Pike, Ronin Films P.O. Box 1005 Civic Square A.C.T. 2608 Ph: 02 6248 0851 Fax: 02 6249 1640

CINDERELLA BETRAYED ARCHIVE FORUM RESPONDS TO AFC December 2003 Directions paper

Cinderella Betrayed of 20 January 2004 is a detailed analysis by Archive Forum of the Australian Film Commission's discussion paper *Directions*, of 12 December 2003. The following document is the Backgrounder to *Cinderella Betrayed*.

OUTLINE

Australia's revered National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) is being dismantled. It wasn't supposed to happen. It doesn't have to. There is a strong move to save it.

Following the Government's Review of Cultural Agencies, the Federal Government announced on 13 May 2003 that the NFSA was to be integrated with the Australian Film Commission (AFC), a Commonwealth Statutory Authority.

They are strikingly dissimilar bodies. The NFSA is a collector and conserver. The AFC is a funder for filmmaking. Each works in a discrete professional and philosophical field. Their integration was seen as a marriage of convenience, which would provide the NFSA with the protection and autonomy of a Statutory Authority it had sought for 19 years as a mere branch of a government department.

Ministers Rod Kemp and Peter McGauran guaranteed the separate identity of the Archive in the new amalgamation.

Consistent with that assurance, there was no announced intention to radically reorganize the NFSA. It didn't need it. There was no declared direction of Government to dismantle and disperse the NFSA. Archives and libraries function as autonomous bodies. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the NFSA either. As the larger body of the two, with a high international reputation as a leader in its field, the NFSA was in a position to offer its experience and reputation to the AFC, as much as the NFSA stood to gain from the AFC's statutory independence.

Yet, inexplicably to observers in the film and sound industries, despite assurances to the contrary, the AFC is dismantling the Archive and threatening its survival as a national heritage institution.

The blueprint for the demise of the NFSA is the AFC's discussion paper *Directions* of 12 December 2003. *Directions* displays ignorance of the nature, role, purpose and work of the NFSA and of the philosophy and ethics of the Archive profession. No independent archive expert was involved in its preparation. Advice from NFSA staff was discounted. Archive Forum has identified scores of contradictions, inconsistencies, errors and wrong assumptions. Radical change is being shaped by radical ignorance.

Lack of knowledge can be corrected. Archive Forum hopes that the Board of the AFC will wipe the slate clean in the forthcoming consultations it has planned with the industry and interested parties—and work cooperatively with the NFSA as an equal partner to preserve the integrity of the Archive. Ministers Kemp and McGauran have made it clear that the AFC must respect the identity and autonomy of the NFSA.

Archive Forum believes, however, that the NFSA should be constituted as a separate Statutory Authority as soon as possible. Recent experience shows that this is the only way to guarantee its autonomy.

SIX KEY POINTS

Following are six of the key findings of *Cinderella Betrayed*.

- 1. Statutory status** The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) should be constituted as an independent Statutory Authority of the Australian Government. This is the only way to protect its autonomy. Such statutory independence was envisaged for the NFSA when it was established 19 years ago. Most other national custodial institutions are similarly protected.
- 2. Dismantling the Archive** The AFC's proposals would see the NFSA lose so much of its independent role and identity that Australia may not be able to claim it as a National Archive. Expert staff and major functions would be dispersed within the AFC, some to subordinate positions. Among other things, the NFSA would lose control over policy formulation, corporate planning, curatorial activities, the ethics and philosophy of its archival profession which strictly govern its work, its budget, structure, image, media profile and ultimate control and accountability for the national collection. Alarming, it would lose its public programs—the vital thread that, like all great Archives, links its collections and its scholarship to the public. They would be dispersed to a branch of the AFC.
- 3. Incompatibility** The AFC and the NFSA are incompatible. The AFC is primarily a development agency for the media production industry. The NFSA is an archival body. Staff are experts in many fields—including curatorial, scientific, technical, research, social history, media, librarianship and archives. The AFC has no experts in archiving, as the NFSA has no experts in the AFC's development and funding work. On the evidence of its *Directions* paper, the AFC seriously lacks knowledge of and sympathy for the NFSA's many levels of expertise, its ethos and its work. It makes the Government's assurances that the AFC would protect the integrity of the NFSA's autonomy as an Archive all the more welcome—even though many of the AFC's proposals defy them. The AFC should act as the statutory custodian of the NFSA's autonomy until NFSA becomes a Statutory Authority.
- 4. Expertise at the top** There are no experienced archivists on the AFC Board and the *Directions* paper does not contemplate rectifying this. There are no archivists on the AFC's senior staff. Although it proposes big changes which affect archival philosophy, strategies and practice, the AFC did not employ any independent archival experts to advise it on the preparations of its *Directions* paper. The AFC's future proposal for expert advice needs strengthening. It proposes the appointment of an Archive Advisory Committee, but its role would be limited to only three of the NFSA's disciplines—collection, preservation and access—and it would meet only once every six months. Archive Forum believes the AFC Board needs

an independently chaired Archive Advisory Committee comprising high experts in all the main fields encompassed by the NFSA, and that it should meet every one or two months. Meantime, dismayed at the behaviour and attitude of the AFC, some expert staff are leaving. Among the first casualties was the NFSA's top archive specialist IT expert, whose innovative work was recognised internationally. Ironically his field of expertise—public and professional access—was one that the AFC, unaware of the NFSA's reputation in it, cited as an area needing effective management.

5. A lack of knowledge Examples of the AFC's lack of knowledge of archiving and the NFSA are: the suggestion to separate film and sound acquisition; asserting that the value of visiting the Archive should give way to online access; apparent ignorance of the sensitivity of personal trust with potential donors—and the skilled professional etiquette involved; the legal complexities of copyright in Archive practice; a call to use technology better without acknowledging that NFSA is an international leader in the field; omission of any reference to the NFSA's large and significant documentation collection and the scholarly and custodial implications of it; criticism of the NFSA's failure to retain indigenous staff, without awareness of the leading role it has played in the field and comparison with other bodies.

6. The Director The position of the Director of the Archive is vacant. Archive Forum fears that the qualifications proposed for the new Director have been diminished from high expertise to a more mundane level. The Forum believes the Director must have substantial curatorial, archival and management experience and expertise, and be a person of high intellectual standing in the international archive community. Archive Forum is deeply concerned that any changes to the NFSA should wait until the new Director has been appointed. This will be a crucial test of good faith.

The AFC and the NFSA can benefit from each other through the curious relationship into which they have been thrust. This can only happen if each respects and protects the other's discrete ethos and role. The government has made it quite clear that the AFC is to be the custodian of the autonomy of the NFSA. Archive Forum hopes that the AFC can approach the next round of discussions with this in mind.

QUICK READ GUIDE

Cinderella Betrayed is available from www.afiresearch.rmit.edu.au/archiveforum

These are key passages:

- Background: Introduction pages 4 to 7
- The issue: What's at stake? pages 8 and 9
- The *Directions* paper pages 12 to 15
- Getting the perspective pages 59 and 60

HOW YOU CAN RESPOND TO THE CURRENT DEBATE

(with thanks to the Archive Forum)

1 DO IT ONLINE:

Go to www.cpsu.org.au/campaigns/ScreenSound/

- Vote on the question 'Do you support the Government's plan to dismantle ScreenSound Australia?'
- Send a protest email to the Minister
- Send a message of support to staff and get on the mailing list

2 DOWNLOAD THE PETITION

Go to www.katelundy.com.au

- Sign it and encourage others to. Mail it back to Senator Kate Lundy

3 GO TO THE ARCHIVE FORUM WEBSITE

Go to www.afiresearch.rmit.edu.au/archiveforum/

- Click on links to read the AFC's *Directions* paper
- Read the Archive Forum response *Cinderella betrayed: the shoe won't fit*
- Read other opinions
- Post your own comments

4 WRITE OR EMAIL THE POLITICIAN OF YOUR CHOICE

- Minister for the Arts, Senator Rod Kemp senator.rod.kemp@aph.gov.au
- Shadow Minister for the Arts, Senator Kate Lundy senator.lundy@aph.gov.au
- Senator Gary Humphries (ACT) senator.humphries@aph.gov.au
- Bob McMullan MP (ACT) Bob.McMullan.MP@aph.gov.au
- Michael Organ MP michael.organ.mp@aph.gov.au
- Senator Kim Carr senator.carr@aph.gov.au

5 SUBMIT A RESPONSE TO THE AFC DIRECTIONS PAPER

- Go to www.afc.gov.au for further information.
- COPY YOUR SUBMISSION to the politicians of your choice. MAKE IT COUNT.
- Make your submission public so others can read it. POST IT ON THE ARCHIVE FORUM WEBSITE.

INVITATION TO STAKEHOLDER FORUMS—

INTEGRATION OF SCREENSOUND AUSTRALIA WITH THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION

The following invitation has been issued by the Australian Film Commission and the AFC has confirmed that members of the Friends are welcome to attend any of the Forums and will be regarded as 'representatives of a stakeholder organisation'.

On 1 July 2003, the Australian Parliament passed legislation giving the Australian Film Commission statutory responsibility for the activities of ScreenSound Australia, the National Screen and Sound Archive. Accordingly, as the Australian Government has determined that ScreenSound will be integrated with the AFC, the AFC has been proceeding to implement the integration in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities.

As part of the process of integration, after wide-ranging discussion and consultations with the archiving and audiovisual industries and stakeholders, the AFC released a *Directions* paper in December 2003 seeking feedback on a range of proposals as to the future programs of ScreenSound Australia.

A copy of the complete *Directions* paper may be downloaded from the AFC's website at www.afc.gov.au.

I am writing to invite you, or a representative of your organisation, to a stakeholder discussion forum on the *Directions* paper as part of the ongoing consultation process. AFC Chair Maureen Barron will be present, along with other Commissioners and senior staff of the AFC and ScreenSound Australia to discuss the proposals contained in the *Directions* paper, as they pertain to the future programs of the National Screen and Sound Archive as an integrated part of the AFC.

Forums are scheduled as follows:

City	Date	Time	Venue
Sydney	Wednesday 28 January	10am to 12noon	AFC Theatre Ground floor 150 William Street

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 would love to hear from you on any Friends topic. You can contact us at friendsofarchive@hotmail.com or ring Lucy on 6248 0851.

FRIENDS WEBSITE

Our website includes How to Join, Newsletter Back Issues, Discussion Papers, our Mission Statement, Events and Contact information. The address is www.archivefriends.org.au. Check it out!

MANY GOOD WISHES FROM YOUR COMMITTEE,

Ina Bertrand, Shelley Clarke, Travis Cragg, Mary Domitrovic, Ray Edmondson, Chris Harrison, Charles Higgins, Oliver Jones, Andrew Kaminski, Tina Kaufman, Richard Keys, Jordie Kilby, Andrew Pike, Cheryl Stevenson and Roger Westcombe.

CONTACT DETAILS

Post: PO Box 1005, Civic Square, ACT, 2608 Phone: 02 6248 0851 Fax: 02 6249 1640

Email: friendsofarchive@hotmail.com Website: www.archivefriends.org.au