

# Australian Council of Film Societies

# BULLETIN

March 2011 Number 23

## What the Constitutional Amendment is all about

### The facts

Following last year's Annual Council Meeting, the Executive of the Australian Council of Film Societies (ACOFs) began a process of consultation with the federations about changes it believes are in the long term interests of the organisation. It put forward a proposal and asked the federations to respond.

The federations' responses were reflected in a second draft of the proposal which was then sent to the federations for further comment. When these responses were received, more amendments were made to the draft, and a third paper, Discussion Paper #3, was distributed. At the same time, a special general meeting was called for 20<sup>th</sup> December for the purpose of adopting, rejecting or amending the proposal. The special meeting decided to (a) adopt the proposal, and (b) authorise the Executive to prepare a draft amendment to the constitution for submission to the 2011 Annual Council Meeting. With a view to resolving a number of issues that were still causing concern in some quarters, the Executive appointed a working party whose members represented a cross section of opinion, and with its help prepared a draft amendment for the annual meeting.

This draft re-defines membership, and eliminates concern expressed by some film societies about increased membership costs. It poses no threat whatever to the federations. As far as the amendment is concerned, the federations can keep going forever. But if a federation decides to remain an affiliate of the new organisation, their relationship will change over time. Under the amendment, a federation has exclusive entitlement to appoint the state's representative to the governing body. If a federation decides to involve its film societies or other organisations in an election, it can recover all its costs. Over time, as other organisations join, the membership will be diluted, and other organisations will be entitled to take part in the appointment process. After five years, the exclusive entitlement will cease, and elections will be conducted, giving all organisations in the state equal rights. On a larger scale, all states and territories will have equal representation, as with the Australian Senate, which was set up to ensure no state or territory would be disadvantaged because of its size or population. This is how democracy is supposed to work.

The draft amendment will be presented to the annual meeting on 16 April. It deals with a complex subject, and is necessarily quite long. It looks daunting, but is written in plain language and is not difficult to understand. A copy of the draft is attached in pdf format for the information of all federations, film society committees and society members. Please circulate as widely as possible.

### More facts

Since embarking on this course, the Executive has taken pains to ensure the process has been transparent and consultative. It has encouraged discussion and feedback, and consistently presented its arguments objectively, by focusing solely on the subject under discussion. But a faction opposing change has chosen to use other methods, including disinformation, to discredit the proposal, the Executive and its motives, to spread fear and doubt, and to put pressure on individuals. For example, an Executive member has been the subject of repeated online attacks. Another has been

expelled from a film society closely linked to a former Executive member. A delegate who has been involved with ACOFS for more than forty years was dumped on the flimsy pretext that he voted 'the wrong way' at the special meeting on 20 December, even though there is no formal compulsion or basis in precedent for delegates to vote in any particular way. The faction has been busily stacking the executive of its state federation with supporters, and it has set up a string of new film societies. Informed observers believe the stacking is in preparation for the federation's upcoming Annual General Meeting, where incumbent office bearers who support the move for reform are likely to be axed; while the addition of new societies is designed to deliver extra delegates to the faction at the ACOFS annual meeting (more on this below).

Sadly, the faction has enjoyed some success. Not surprisingly, long time volunteers who are disturbed by the turmoil and dissension, have had enough. They are severing their connections, and their talents will be lost to the organisation. At another level, concerned individuals and film societies have been led to believe the proposal to amend the constitution tramples upon democratic principles. Nothing could be further from the truth. The existing constitution is so outdated and inadequate it allows a federation with enough film societies to swamp a meeting with delegates, reducing the decision-making process to a travesty. Next month in Launceston one federation is likely to claim entitlement to more delegates than the other three federations put together, on the basis of new societies added to its register in the past few weeks. This and other recent events demonstrate more powerfully than anything else could have, that reform is long overdue.

The truth is that the amended constitution will replace the former oligarchic (rule by the few) structure with a genuine democracy in which every state and territory has equal representation. There are other differences, but this is the essence of change and the critical difference between the old and the new. If you are not yet persuaded that the proposed constitutional amendment is a good thing, please read the attached draft, take the opportunity to be informed, and contact ACOFS directly (details below).

#### **Comments welcome**

Whatever your position on the matter, your comments are welcome. If you believe the constitution should be amended, the executive would especially value and appreciate your support. Just email the Secretary, Eric Dixon, at [ericwdixon@hotmail.com](mailto:ericwdixon@hotmail.com). A few words of encouragement would make a nice change.

#### **LAUNCESTON, HERE WE COME**

The program for the annual meeting and connected events is in final stages of preparation, and it's really going to be an occasion to remember. Things will kick off on the evening of Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April with a low key drinks and nibbles get-together. The formalities of the annual meeting will occupy the morning of Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>, and after lunch the highlight will be David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz live, on stage, in discussion. David will also be introducing a favourite film whose title he is keeping to himself. Plenty of opportunities to catch up with old friends and make new ones. Good food, good coffee and a good time will be had by all.

If you haven't already made accommodation arrangements, Launceston Film Society members are generously offering to billet visitors. Huge thanks to them for their hospitality. Contact [ericwdixon@hotmail.com](mailto:ericwdixon@hotmail.com)

The proposed program for Launceston is:

*Friday April 15<sup>th</sup>*

6.30pm Drinks and Nibbles. For delegates and friends. Chance to "get-to-know" before the "main event". Venue - The Tram Shed.

8.15pm Finish

*Saturday April 16<sup>th</sup>*

**The Tram Shed, 4 Invermay Road, Inveresk, Tasmania.**

9.00am Registration of delegates and observers.

9.20am ACOFS Meeting

10.50am Morning Tea

11.10am ACOFS AGM

*The 2010 Executive saw an opportunity for revitalisation, and wants ACOFS to be a peak body representing the Australian Film Society Movement to Government, Distributors and the International Film Federation (with particular emphasis on New Zealand).*

*In negotiating and lobbying they plan to stress "Community and Cinema".*

*Support to member organisations is to be provided by a web-based service and senate style representation.*

*This vision has resulted in a revised constitution, to be discussed and voted on here.*

12.40pm Lunch for delegates and observers.

1.40pm Opportunity for general public to join function.

1.45pm Introduction – the President.

1.55pm Dorothy Jenkins "Film Societies as Educators".

2.20pm The International Film Federation General Assembly, Brazil December 2010 – Michael O'Rourke

2.35pm The Tasmanian Film Society Scene.

2.45pm The Breath of Fresh Air Festival.

2.55pm Launceston Film Society – Mark Horner

3.10pm Afternoon Tea

3.30pm David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz "live-on-stage".

4.20pm Introduction to the film – David Stratton.

4.30pm A surprise film from David's own collection.

6.45pm Free.

7.15pm Drinks and nibbles.

7.45pm Entertainment.

8.00pm Dinner.

9.00pm Finish.

*Sunday April 17<sup>th</sup>*

9.00am Breakfast. (own cost). Venue TBA.

## **RSVP**

If you'd like to come, please reply to the ACOFS Secretary, Eric Dixon [ericwdixon@hotmail.com](mailto:ericwdixon@hotmail.com) by Sunday April 10<sup>th</sup>.

## **Billeting**

If you would like to be billeted in Launceston – please email Eric ASAP.

## **Registration**

Cost of full registration - including Friday night drinks and nibbles, morning and afternoon tea, dinner, evening entertainment, David and Margaret and David's surprise film - just \$30.

Entry at 1.40pm for just \$20. Pay at the door.

## **The NFSA (not NTLC) sets new charges**

The National Film and Sound Archive has now comprehensively reviewed their fees for the first time since 2001.

They have revised their schedules for copying and handling fees, loans of film prints for *theatrical* screenings and for the public and commercial use of NFSA controlled material. Copies of these new schedules can be found on their website at:

<http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/collection-enquiries/>

The new fees will come into effect as of 1 March 2011, although they will honour any quote for work agreed to prior to that time where it results in a lower charge.