

Australian Council of Film Societies

BULLETIN

November 2010

The times they are a changing

In recent years it has become evident that the Australian Council of Film Societies needs to re-invent itself. This view has been expressed at several annual general meetings, including the 2010 meeting held in York, Western Australia. Following this meeting, the ACOFS Executive decided to look at the reasons why re-invention is necessary, and to consult with the state federations in developing a proposal for change. The first draft of the proposal was prepared and distributed to the federations in late June. Responses were received from the federations and a second draft that addresses their views and concerns is close to completion. This draft will also be circulated and responses invited. The refined draft will then become the subject of a special meeting of federation delegates, which will have two courses of action open to it. It can consider the draft, make any changes it considers desirable or necessary, and put forward a recommendation for adoption to the 2012 Annual General Meeting. Alternatively the delegates can decide that no change is needed, and the proposal will lapse.

Let's look at why the Executive believes things need to change. There are many reasons, but we'll stick to just four.

First, not so long ago, screening a film was complicated. It required special equipment, technical experts and access to a comprehensive, reliable film library. Today's technology enables anyone with a few dollars to assemble an inexpensive digital kit, buy some DVDs and start screening anytime, anywhere. This quantum shift has occurred in less than five years and as it gains traction it is going to have a profound effect across Australia, especially in small communities in regional areas. New community groups are springing up all over the place, and more are coming. Not all the new organisations can be defined as film societies under present definitions, and many don't want to be part of the traditional film society movement, but they are all non-

profit, they all love going to the movies and they can all see benefits for their communities in the shared cinema experience. The ACOFS umbrella should be extended to include them.

Secondly, ACOFS does not directly represent all Australian states and territories. Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory are theoretically represented by New South Wales, and South Australia by Victoria. To complicate the issue, some film societies choose to join federations in other states, and the federations choose to accept them as members, effectively nullifying the concept of individual federations and interstate co-operation. Thirdly, in any organisation, unless a new generation is ready to step forward when the time comes, the organisation inevitably reaches a point where it can no longer function. ACOFS has not addressed the issue of succession planning.

And fourthly, film is a very important part of Australian cultural life. Because ACOFS represents the whole spectrum of non-commercial 'film-in-the-community' activity, it should be pursuing a pro-active role as the national peak body, working on behalf of every single member of every single community organisation involved in the presentation of films.

This is not an exhaustive summary of the rationale, but you get the idea. ACOFS can either acknowledge reality or walk away from it.

Therefore, the Executive proposes to replace the existing Council and Executive with a single incorporated body comprising representatives from each State and Territory. The new organisation will undertake a number of 'peak body' functions, such as forming links, alliances and partnerships with other peak bodies, establishing a national profile and gaining representation for national community cinema on related and appropriate policy-making organisations. The organisation will be in a position to provide services to States and Territories not presently serviced by federations; and to assume responsibility for the provisions of services in regions where federations cease to exist. The organisation will not become involved in operations currently being undertaken by federations in their 'home' states unless it is expressly invited to do so.

The name of the organisation will be Community Cinema Australia (CCA).

All members of affiliated film societies will automatically be members of CCA. They will have voting rights in Board elections and be eligible for election to the Board. Expanding membership to the widest possible base is seen as essential if the presently inevitable decline and demise of the existing film society movement is to be prevented. Rationalising the present compartmentalised structure into a single organisation with two tiers would facilitate improved communication between tiers, eliminate the need for duplication of member services in multiple regions and provide more efficient, cost-effective administration.

IFFS

A meeting was held at the Italian Cultural Institute, 1 Macquarie Place, Sydney on Wednesday October 7th, 2010 at 6pm.

In attendance were Dr. Paolo Minuto – President, International Federation of Film Societies (IFFS), Martin Kelly – Director, Newtown Flicks, Michael O'Rourke – President, NSW Federation of Film Societies and Bryan Putt – President, Australian Council of Film Societies (ACOFS).

A very warm and cordial meeting and valuable links were established.

Information was exchanged by both sides on the operation of film societies.

Of special interest, was that nearly all overseas national federations are supported by government and even local societies have local government financial support - because of the belief of the high cultural and health benefit seen to be gained by participation in the film society movement. (This is also a view shared by NFSA Board member and Director of Ronin Films, Andrew Pike).

A possible area of action for ACOFS!

It would seem that the ACOFS screening rights' deal is in general, a good one. Most societies outside Australia screen DVD with still 30% using 35mm. Apparently no-one is showing 16mm.

Paolo indicated his keenness to gather national newsletters with the aim to compile an international publication focussing on film society activities, globally. He accepted a copy of the current Victorian ReelNews. He also asked for histories of individual societies which he could use in the book (as many as possible). These should come with the acknowledgement that the IFFS is free to publish them.

ACOFS was invited to submit material to the IFFS archive in Lausanne, run by Robert Richter and held in the Swiss Film Archive. Discussions were had regarding the forthcoming release of John Turner's history of the Australian film society movement. Mention was also made of Cine Sud based in Barcelona, which collects films which can be screened throughout the IFFS movement. Paolo alerted us to *Not the Last Picture Show*, which one of the IFFS newsletters gives the YouTube link. Martin felt that sending the winning films from Newtown Flicks short film festival to Cine Sud would be a great way for the young filmmakers to get international exposure.

IFFS flagged the idea of involving ACOFS in next year's Italian Film Festival with some potentially promising outcomes for Australian film societies – specifically the offer to screen festival films (on DVD) for little (or no) screening rights for a two month period after the main event. He was also suggesting that societies might be able to access the DVDs in the Italian Cultural Institute's collection.

Further, the request was made for ACOFS to consider mounting an IFFS Film Festival. This is apparently a very prestigious event staged at different locations around the world, every two years – previously mainly in Europe. The festival screens films submitted by national bodies such as ACOFS and culminates in the awarding of the Don Quixote Prize. Many recipients of this prize have historically gone on to receive commercial acclaim.

As well, ACOFS was encouraged to send someone to the next General Assembly in December in Brazil – all expenses paid by the Brazilian Government. He said with some pride that there was a film society in Kabul. And that Norway had taken it upon itself to pay the IFFS membership fees on their behalf. This seemed to say a lot about the camaraderie and support that existed within the organisation.

We will be represented in Brazil by Michael O'Rourke (VP-ACOFS) in December.

We also informed Paulo about the Global Film Initiative and Global Lens, which is a non-profit organisation dedicated to "Promoting cross cultural understanding through film". They may be very interested in establishing links (and possibly setting up joint ventures) with the IFFS.

Martin Kelly was keen to explore ways of getting exposure for his independent Australian films (mostly short at this time). It was indicated that ACOFS sees this as one of its central planks.

Launceston

Advanice notice that a convention is being planned for Launceston.

It will take place on the 15th, 16th and 17th April, 2011. It will incorporate the AGM of ACOFS.

Already lined up are a speaker from New Zealand, a PhD student doing research into the film society movement, two people to talk on starting up and running a community cinema, a report from the Vice President's attendance at the General Assembly of the IFFS in Brazil, as well as an on-stage live discussion between Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton on the best films of the last 25 years.

Insurance

Currently ACOFS is self-insuring. Below is an outline of the policy.

Insured are ACOFS and all State Federations and film societies with full membership.

Covered are all films and DVDs on hire or borrowed from a third party.

The cover is for loss or damage included damage while being projected.

There is an \$8000 **limit** with, for any one 35mm film - \$4000, 16mm - \$4000 or DVD - \$50.

On each and every claim there is an **excess** of \$100 for 35mm and \$100 for 16mm film and \$10 for DVDs.

All items sent by freight must be traceable.

For claims for damage during projection, a logbook must be presented that indicates regular maintenance and proof that the projectionist has done a training course and has had a refresher course within the last three years.

This policy does not exempt third-party carriers from paying their stated insurance cover.

Any payout from ACOFS would be less any amount due to be received due to loss by a third-party carrier.

Damage caused to a film by projectors owned and operated by a third-party is not covered by this policy.

ACOFS Executive, 2010

Bryan Putt – President – Victoria

Michael O'Rourke – Vice President - NSW

Eric Dixon – Secretary – Victoria

Mark Horner – Treasurer – Tasmania

Michael Lines-Kelly – New South Wales

Paul Sofilas – Western Australia

