

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF FILM SOCIETIES

# ACOFS BULLETIN

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- **Report on the 2008 AGM and Conference in Canberra.**
- **Update on the latest position of the NFSA regarding the NFVLS**
- **Future directions for ACOFS**

**THIS YEAR'S AGM** and conference was a lively affair with several new voices being heard during the discussions. Topics from previous years were dealt with first and resulted in a call for more participation in the YAHOO Group Forum on which societies can post their views on the print conditions of titles borrowed from the NFVLS. This is very useful for all borrowers to consult when programming films from the NFVLS, but is vastly underused. For everyone's information, you may log on to this service at:  
[OzMovieBuffs@yahoogroups.com.au](mailto:OzMovieBuffs@yahoogroups.com.au)

There was a good deal of discussion on the ACOFS Handbook and from this the ACOFS Web site. The superiority of the Victorian Federation website was acknowledged and subcommittees were set up to review the NSW Federation content on its website and also to review the ACOFS website. The Handbook information is to be updated.

A sub-committee has been elected to investigate the publication possibilities of the Film Society History on which I am currently working.

Each state reported on its activities for the year. Tasmania has increased its member societies from 7 to 10 and reported on each one while Western Australia is battling to keep its four societies viable. Victoria, under its new President Bryan Putt, reported on its new structure, a revamp of the Reel News newsletter and ideas for revitalising its AGM, to be held in May. Victoria also increased its society base from 45 to 49, and presented a summary on the screening ratios and sources as well as the locations of its members.

Victoria also presented a DVD Screening Rights document prepared by Ian Davidson which detailed policy, rights agreements and the main sources, as well as a page of frequently asked questions. There was quite a discussion on these topics.

I presented my President's Report which centred on the task of revitalising ACOFS. We need to reinvent ourselves and attract people who will not only run successful film screening groups but will also put some effort into their State Federation and ultimately ACOFS. There was a long debate over the contents of this report and, on a positive note, a long submission from Roger Westcombe of Big House Film Society in Canberra which will be summarised in a separate article at the end of this Bulletin.

Our guests spent all Saturday afternoon with us and Gael McIndoe gave a PowerPoint presentation on the future plans of ACMI which include DVD's for non commercial screenings for Victorian Film societies, a plan to take ACMI out to the bush by mounting regional events and finally a very ambitious project to turn the ground floor of the ACMI building at Federation Square into a permanent exhibition on the History of the Moving Image.

Gayle Lake from the AFC could not attend in person but sent a written report on the Regional Screen Network. This has been a great success in the light of AFC expectations and the eight participating centres have reported increases in audiences during the past 12 months. No indication was given whether the network will expand due to the uncertainty of the AFC's future following its amalgamation with the FFC on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Finally we had a long presentation from Graham Shirley and then a discussion with Graham and also David Boden and Bronwyn Coupe, all of which will be summarised in the next article. On the Sunday morning we discussed and analysed what we had been told by the group from the NFSA and came up with a list of requirements for the NFVLS collection which is part of the next article.

Finally we elected officers for 2008 and unfortunately Richard Purdy, Secretary for the past four years and very active in addition to this role, did not stand for re-election and will be missed. Also Michael Lines-Kelly decided not to stand after one year as vice-president, which again was a great loss as we need to find a new president.

The elected officers are: PRESIDENT John Turner (Victoria), VICE PRESIDENT Michael O'Rourke (NSW), SECRETARY Beris Bradford (NSW) and TREASURER David Bruce-Steer (NSW).

### **VERY LITTLE PROGRESS ON THE NFVLS LENDING COLLECTION**

Paolo Cherchi Usai opened the AGM and Conference on the Friday evening and did in fact mention the fact that DVD or like digital media would become more prevalent in the future, but the NFSA would not be embracing this new development and remained committed to 35mm.

Graham Shirley then gave a long presentation in which he detailed his career through all the different media to present day digital. He outlined the archives' restoration capacity and current projects, including restoring the Corrick films to black and white and tinted 35mm. He also spoke about the current work being done by Atlab/Kodak which has restored and produced 35mm prints of Australian films for some years.

Finally, in relation to the NFVLS, Graham confirmed his expectation that the collection would be transferred from the NLA to the NFSA on July 1<sup>st</sup> next. The NFVLS would then be amalgamated with the archive lending collection (which has no licenses for non-theatrical - including film society - screenings) and become "The NFSA Lending Collection". Depending on available funding the NFSA would purchase 35mm titles to add to the collection and consider, where relevant, purchasing DVD copies from a selection of these 35mm prints. Rare 16mm prints now in the NFVLS collection would be withdrawn for preservation purposes.

When the two collections are merged films licensed for non-theatrical screenings (those from the current NFVLS) will be clearly identifiable for borrowers. For those of you not familiar with the current extensive NFSA collection, these films (mainly on 35mm but some 16mm) are not licensed, and borrowers need to contact the rights holder for permission to screen.

Graham made two very important statements. First he said that "the age of 16mm film is over".

"It is a reality that film societies will have to face, and NFSA cannot itself continue to invest in an obsolete medium."

He continued: "we are not primarily DVD dealers. An archive is not about promoting the minimum common denominator, which right now could be seen as either DVD or VHS."

Voicing a sentiment also expressed by Paolo, he said film societies should upgrade to 35mm.

The good news in all of this is that borrowings will continue, as they are currently resourced and all rights have been renewed for the next two years. However borrowings continue to fall, which is to be expected with users turning to DVD as no new acquisitions are made.

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

There are two courses of action open to us, as I see it. One, we can wait until July 1<sup>st</sup> when the NFSA becomes a separate body, with its own Board of Management, and presumably takes

over ownership of the national collection from the NLA. Two, we can become pro-active and lobby the appropriate minister, currently Peter Garrett, with our concerns, and also encourage local politicians and community leaders to become involved. Both of these actions have some delegates' support but we have decided initially to take the first option.

There are several reasons for this decision and the most valid one in my opinion is the potential to alienate the NFSA without actually achieving anything going directly to the Minister.

Another decision undertaken was to apply for a position on the new Board of Management, and this was done immediately after the meeting. We have had no reply from the Minister's department and it is possible we will only get a reply when the Board has been appointed. I have also approached several prominent figures in the film world, each of whom would certainly be in the forefront of candidates for Board appointments, and if only one of these obtains a position we will have a strong supporter for our cause.

In private discussions with the three guests from the NFSA I was given the understanding that we could expect a positive hearing if we applied to have several of the Australian features held by the archive transferred to DVD and licensed for non-theatrical screenings. However when the request was made, I was told that no decisions will be made before July.

What are our concerns?

1. Our course of action must in future embrace all community, educational and other groups using the NFVLS, and not be confined solely to film societies.
2. We have to get through to NFSA decision makers that these user groups rely on 16mm and to an increasing extent DVD and, in the future, the next generation of digital output.  
35mm film is a luxury about 1% of non-commercial screening groups can embrace.
3. A licensed DVD collection is the only current viable alternative if the old Film Study Collection is to survive. This could easily be activated from the archive's current collection of pristine 35mm prints of Australian titles.
4. Many of the current 16mm prints need to be replaced and a budget should be set up for this purpose. If 16mm replacements are no longer obtainable, the lending medium should be DVD.
5. We would like to see a reincarnation of the Advisory Committee for the lending collection. ACOFS played a prominent role on this committee when it existed during ACMI's period of management and I feel it is still the best possible method of keeping the decision makers in touch with their constituents.

These are the minimum requirements and the basis for re-energising the national collection.

**Again I would be most interested in your feedback, especially from groups who are finding it hard to survive because of the lack of new acquisitions in the NFVLS collection.**

### **THE FUTURE OF ACOFS.**

As noted earlier, the Conference spent some time debating this issue without coming up with any specific action plan. Afterwards, Roger Westcombe from the Big House film society in Canberra put forward some very interesting observations which I will summarise.

### **Younger Audiences.**

"We need to form a strategic alliance with the local TAFE/Uni teachers of film and media and any other community or educational group." I feel that by offering a discounted membership to any other local group could not only get us more members per society but bring a new outlook into our organisations. Another way in would be to put on special screenings for other groups who may not be particularly interested in films as such. We could certainly accommodate art, photography and book groups and even sporting bodies.

### **Terminology.**

Roger voiced something we have spoken about several times, that '*film society*' is not the most modern or eye catching title. We need a more exciting 'brand' name. Roger also felt that we should align ourselves with all other film screening community groups and become the spokesman for a far bigger sector which will make our voice much more viable to any government submission. Certainly we are the only nationally organised body covering the whole country outside capital cities in the area of non-commercial film exhibition. We are in a very good position and should make use of it.

Roger also raised the subject of 'marketing' which again we have discussed in the past without anyone taking up the ball and running with it. This is closely allied to the previous topic and if we could sell ourselves to other film and cultural groups as the peak body to represent them in terms of non-commercial exhibition, we would have achieved an enormous step forward.

Roger then went on to ask *what do we really want*. This is a very hard thing to define because there are many different aims within the family of film societies, highlighted during our Sunday discussion. Every aspect of the cinema, be it technical, political, national or genre, is represented within ACOFS.

We have a challenge to define our ultimate aim, but it can be done and needs to be faced.

There is much to think about here and I really need some feed back so please email me at [JOHNTURNER10@bigpond.com](mailto:JOHNTURNER10@bigpond.com) with your thoughts, concerns, ideas or any other matters.

John Turner  
May 2008.